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SUBJECT: AKP STATE MINISTER CUBUKCU PESSIMISTIC ON CLOSURE
CASE

REF: ANKARA 536

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL SHARON WIENER, REASON 1.5.(D)

11. (C) Summary: State Minister Nimet Cubukcu expressed her concerns regarding the Justice and Development Party (AKP) closure case to Consul General at a small dinner party April 4 in Istanbul. Despite the "baseless" charges against the party, Cubukcu expected the high court would ban the party if the case went that far. This attack on the party reminded Cubukcu of the injustices that occurred during the 1980 military administration. The AKP could successfully eliminate the charges against it by amending the constitution, yet Erdogan does not want to take this step at this time. The closure case has unified the party base and increased public support for the party, according to Cubukcu.

Erdogan explicitly asked his supporters not to go to the streets and for AKP Parliament members to refrain from commenting because the media -- which Cubukcu sees an opponent of the AKP -- would claim the party is fomenting unrest. Cubukcu said Erdogan is strongly committed to his ideals and is capable of surprising his opponents and likely to do so. End Summary.

12. (C) Founding Justice and Development Party (AKP) member and State Minister Nimet Cubukcu stressed concern over the AKP closure case to Consul General on April 4. At a small dinner party in Istanbul hosted by AKP Istanbul Women's Branch Director for International Relations Mutlu Alkan-Kutukluoglu, Cubukcu told us her concern that the judiciary is being used to achieve what opponents of AKP failed to do at the ballot box. She claimed the case is without merit, providing examples of these "baseless" charges. Cubukcu, however, does not trust the judiciary to fairly decide AKP's fate; she expects the high court would rule against AKP if the case goes that far. Cubukcu said she believes AKP's opponents want to ban the ruling party to provide an opportunity for the opposition parties to seize power. AKP opponents will expect the members from the banned party to reorganize under a different name, yet the opposition parties could use this transition period to snatch the reins of power.

Increasing reminders of the 1980 coup

13. (C) Cubukcu lamented that the current situation is bringing back sour memories of the military coup in 1980. Her family suffered greatly after the coup; both her brother and father were arrested during military rule. Her brother was in prison for about six months, and the results from his torture lingered for at least 10 years after his release. Cubukcu explained this led her to study law and work to defend human rights. She now fears AKP opponents are willing

to use desperate measures to remove AKP from power. AKP success in managing the economy and winning elections has limited the AKP's opponents' options for eliminating the party. Cubukcu claimed AKP,s opponents are willing to ruin Turkey's economy, end Turkey's bid for EU membership, and destroy democracy in Turkey, in order to defeat AKP. Both Cubukcu and Alkan-Kutukluoglu stated they saw military invention as a possible response, if AKP survives the closure case.

AKP,s Response

¶4. (C) According to Cubukcu, AKP could respond to the closure case by amending the constitution and eliminating the legal grounds supporting the current closure case (reftel). Cubukcu acknowledged the party lacks the two-thirds support to amend the constitution outright, but she was confident there is enough support in the Parliament to send the amendment to a popular referendum. Cubukcu claimed Prime Minister Erdogan did not wish bring this to a public referendum at this time, however she confidently stated this referendum would pass with over 60 percent public support. Moreover, Cubukcu asserted AKP could out-maneuver expected legal challenges to the constitutional referendum itself.

¶5. (C) Cubukcu emphasized the closure case is unifying AKP and increasing the party's popular support. AKP's grassroots supporters understand this is a struggle for the life of the movement and are rallying behind Erdogan. Before the closure case many inside AKP, including Alkan-Kutukluoglu, were criticizing government policies regarding the economy. Now, anger directed at those who want to ban AKP has silenced criticisms from within and reunified the party. Moderates who

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were not traditional AKP voters understand the ruling party is not causing instability in Turkey. This group, which includes many from the business community who support Turkey's path to the EU and economic development, will also continue to support AKP. Even people who would never vote for AKP are critical of this judicial tactic to thwart democracy, according to Cubukcu. AKP has a good grasp of the public pulse since it conducts its own private polling; however Cubukcu told us she has not seen the latest results from these surveys.

¶6. (C) Both Cubukcu and Alkan-Kutukluoglu emphasized the party is not going to hold mass protests over the closure case. Despite the genuine anger of many AKP supporters, the leadership prefers to pound the pavement and interact face-to-face with voters. Staging protests would put this in the hands of the media, one of the primary forces combating AKP. Cubukcu added AKP could have sent two to three times the number of protesters to the streets last year in response to the "phony" protests of Abdullah Gul's presidential candidacy. Cubukcu said Erdogan had a hard time keeping his supporters off the streets, but he did not want to provide ammunition for the media which would spin it to claim AKP was causing instability in Turkey. Cubukcu accused the media of manipulating stories, such as the closure case, to create unrest in Turkey. Both Cubukcu and Alkan-Kutukluoglu discounted claims that AKP,s actions are polarizing the society, again accusing the media of intentionally causing tensions.

Erdogan's Resolve

¶7. (C) Cubukcu stated she knows the Prime Minister very well and understands his deep commitment to Turkey. He was willing to go to prison again and is even willing "to be hanged" for his beliefs, according to Cubukcu. He has in the past done the unexpected, taking his opponents by surprise, Cubukcu explained. Calling for early elections last year in response to the campaign to block AKP's choice for president was a

bold move that caught the opposition off guard. AKP quickly mobilized an election campaign while the opposition reacted poorly to Erdogan's maneuver. She was confident that AKP can always establish a new party under a different name and return to politics.

¶18. (C) Cubukcu lamented the opportunity AKP lost after winning the national elections. Had they worked "just one more day a week", they could have kept their promise to send a new constitution to Parliament. This revised constitution would have included stricter rules for closing political parties, thus preempting the current closure case. Unfortunately, the presidential election and terror issues distracted AKP from working on substantive constitutional reform; however they should have worked overtime to ensure the passage of the new constitution before the end of 2007, according to Cubukcu. Now with the current crisis and the real threat of being removed from power, Cubukcu was pessimistic on achieving these reforms in the near future.

Defending the Three Children Policy

¶19. (SBU) In response to a question, Cubukcu explained the media misrepresented Erdogan's "three children" statement. Cubukcu acknowledged the government cannot tell people how many children they should have, however, she added, governments can have population policies. Growth rates in Turkey are slowing down and the GOT could face problems similar to what Europe is facing today, relying on an immigrant workforce in response to an aging population. Turkey would have this problem in 30 years if the country does not work to keep a younger population; the most dynamic section of a nation's population according to Cubukcu. To maintain a relatively young society, Turkey needs to increase the population growth rate to 2.8 percent annually, hence Erdogan's encouragement for families to have three children.

Attitudes Towards the U.S.

¶10. (SBU) The Consul General noted public attitudes towards the U.S. are noticeably better compared to her earlier time in Turkey. During the 1970's the Consul General said she frequently saw anti-American graffiti, which is absent today. While poll numbers might be worse today, Turks do not reflect this sentiment in everyday interactions with Americans. Cubukcu agreed, saying anti-Americanism was much deeper and widespread in the 70's; today most Turks genuinely

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like Americans, while the negative polling numbers mostly reflect opinions towards U.S. polices.

Comment:

¶11. (C) Despite their resolve, Cubukcu and Alkan-Kutukluoglu were pessimistic regarding the future of the party. Lost opportunities, worsening economic conditions, and the possibility of military intervention all weighed heavily on both of them. Cubukcu was dismayed by the level of damage to Turkey the opponents of AKP seem willing to inflict; even if AKP weathers this storm, there will likely be a larger crisis coming over the horizon. Both Cubukcu and Alkan-Kutukluoglu displayed great admiration for Erdogan that went beyond "party loyalty". Almost assuredly, they would follow him to a new party if AKP were banned. In contrast, Erdogan's ban from politics would deprive the movement--at least temporarily--of a leader who plays a significant personal role in attracting and motivating AKP's grassroots supporters.

WIENER